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The Spirit of '76.

HOW IT IS ILLUSTRATED IN THE HEROIC STRUGGLE
OF THE CUBAN PATRIOTS.

SPEECH

OF

HON. AMOS J. CUMMINGS,
OF NEW YORK,

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

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THE SPIRIT OF '76.

Mr. CUMMINGS said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: If there is anything precious, endearing, and potential in the American people, it is the spirit of '76. Sir, it is the germ of our existence as a nation. It ought to be as enduring as endearing. Is it? The spirit of '76! What was it? What is it? It was here one hundred and twenty years ago. Is it here to-day? We have often heard of it. Its great work is before us. But do we comprehend it? It expressed itself in so many events during the dramatic period of the Revolution that a definite idea of it can not be gained from any one of them. It was in truth an evolution in government. It was in sooth a parting of ways.

"When the devil of tyranny once enters the body politic," said Macaulay, "it departs not but by struggles, by groanings, and by great convulsions." The world was ripe. The hour for the great struggle had arrived and the agony was on. The battle was between legitimacy and individual and public rights. It was a shifting of the power of the state from the will of the monarch to the control of the people.

"I will govern according to the public weal, but not according to the public will," bluntly declared James I. George III set himself to the pace. This states the issue precisely. It was the public will against the will of the monarch. The promulgation of the issue astonished the world. The result enlightened it more than it had ever been enlightened in regard to government. It awakened intellectual activity as to the rights of man and the philosophy of government. All that is ferocious and grasping in tyranny came to the front. All that is grand in sacrifice met it, humiliated it, conquered it.

Sir, the victorious impulse was called the spirit of '76; but it was not born in '76. It has a biography in the history of our race run-

ning back through ages. Over and over again it tried to assert itself and was as often stricken down by the mailed hand of despotism. On every page of the history of the race, either by its own efforts or by measures for its suppression, it records itself. If, instead of pitchforks and staves, Jack Cade and his followers had possessed the ballot, as we now possess it, they would have overthrown monarchy in a day. Their provocation was as great and their motives as just as those that inspired the heroes of our Revolution. They were utterly overwhelmed. A servile literature gave them an inheritance of infamy; but a just judgment is lifting it into a reminiscent glory. Many and many another effort has gone down before the atrocious spirit of grasping tyranny.

In these struggles for freedom we trace the growth of the spirit of '76. Though its growth was slow, it was constant as to its purpose and undeviating. In our Revolution it had a new advantage. An ocean rolled between it and its pursuers. For the first time in history it had a broad field upon which to demonstrate. It turned at bay, erect, grand, defiant. It spoke to General Gage through the lips of the schoolboys on Boston Common; it inspired the negro Attucks in the Boston massacre; it was manifest in the tea chests afloat in Boston Harbor; it appeared in the belfry of the Old North Church, and sent Paul Revere on his famous ride; it spoke spitefully from the muzzles of American rifles at Concord and Lexington, and it sanctified itself in the blood of Warren at Bunker Hill. At times it appeared in qualities in no way akin to it.

The Continental Army, ragged and destitute, simply did its bidding. That Army showed no such devotion to the person of its chief as did the army of Italy to Napoleon, or the Army of the Potomac to McClellan. Its blood-stained snow tracks at Valley Forge attested its devotion to the cause of liberty. At times it was mutinous; at times marauding. Desertions were common in it—even to the enemy. But the spirit of '76 always regathered and strengthened it. It visited every gathering, it mounted every pulpit, it appeared at every hearthstone, it sat at every table. Defying danger and death, it energized all ages and both sexes. It animated Moll Pitcher at Monmouth and immortalized Nathan Hale on the gallows.

As the peril darkened, it made its way across the Atlantic, entered the English Parliament, and pleaded the cause of freedom in the very presence of the King. Its astounding demonstration awoke the world, and won the applause of even savage tribes. It forced its way upon the great stage of human action, never again to relinquish a leading part. Apparently dormant after the surrender at Yorktown and the signing of the treaty at Paris, it was roused anew by British aggression nearly thirty years afterwards. It arose incarnate in 1812. It tore from its adversary the crown of supremacy on the ocean, and awoke anew the echoes of freedom on Lake Champlain and Lake Erie. [Applause.] It idealized itself in Andrew Jackson at New Orleans, and lifted Decatur, Hull, Porter, McDonough, and Stewart to a level with Paul Jones in the temple of fame.

To-day every monarch recognizes its presence and pays heed to its inspiring mandates. It is fast driving imperialism from the boards and filling the stage with its wholesome and godlike presence. The divinity of its mission challenges despotism to its most frantic efforts. In Greece, for the moment, it seems to have lost its footing; but in our neighboring island, the Queen of the Antilles, it is engaged in as hard a task as that which it accomplished on this ground. [Applause.]

To that devoted island despotism has summoned all its terrors and made use of all its savage implements. But the spirit of '76 is there[applause], and there to stay. All undeviating and undaunted, its torn and bleeding squadrons pour from mountain fastnesses on plain and in valley to confront and defy the uttermost efforts of Spanish tyranny. For some inscrutable reason it calls in vain for help—help almost tendered, but still withheld. It breasts the terrible storm friendless and unaided. Marti, like another Warren, fell at the beginning of the conflict; Maceo, like Montgomery, brilliant and daring, lies dead in the second year of the war.

But Gomez and Garcia, like another Washington and another Greene, maintain the deadly struggle undaunted and undismayed, deaf to all threats and cajolements. No Lafayette has appeared—not even a Louis XVI. And America only 60 miles away! A whole continent wrested from Spain, and Cuba left to all the horrors of extermination, without one word of official sympathy.

Grant had only to frown on the empire set up by Louis Napoleon in Mexico, and it faded away. In his memoirs he says:

I sent Sheridan with a corps to the Rio Grande to have him where he might aid Juarez in driving the French from Mexico.

He waited for no declaration of war; nor did Bazaine wait for it. He packed up, bag and baggage, and left American soil at once. But Grant is dead, Sheridan is dead. Can it be that the spirit of '76 has taken its departure with them? [Applause.] A great people were behind them, and the tyrant tottered to his fall. Such was the power of the great Republic at the end of our civil war. Has it lost its manhood within thirty years, and is there no majestic figure left in the affairs of the nation? [Applause.]

Still the agonizing struggle continues at our very door. At reveille every morning the priest has been seen, crucifix in hand, walking beside fair youths and hoary-headed men, to be shot to death for no crime but their devotion to the spirit of '76. In every instance before the fatal volley the last exclamation of the victim was, "Liberty to Cuba!" The cruelty of the act wrings the heart, but the grandeur of the sacrifice ennoble the cause.

The mission of America, as declared in the Monroe doctrine, is to foster liberty and drive despotism from this continent. [Applause.] That doctrine is the guardian of the spirit of '76. It was not the expression of the sentiment of Monroe alone. It was the embodiment of the sentiment of the nation. Without this it could have no force; with it, it has proved invincible. Jackson was unswerving to its dictates when he scornfully refused the mission to Mexico with Iturbide on the throne. "I will never recognize Iturbide as emperor," he replied. And Richard Olney exhibited the same American spirit when he warned England against her encroachments on the soil of Venezuela, freed from centuries of Spanish tyranny by Simon Bolivar.

Those who revere oppression point to the struggling Cuban patriots and say that such scattered, destitute, and emaciated bands do not deserve freedom and would not know how to use it if they had it. Ah, Mr. Chairman, this is only a repetition of the scorn, contempt, and derision that were heaped upon Washington and his tattered battalions by royalists and American Tories.

There is no appeal that will nerve the arm of a patriot like a cry

from the helpless. That cry comes with appalling force from Cuba to-day.

The shrieks of daughters and wives, struggling in the arms of the beastly Hessians in the Revolution, were incentives to action far more stirring than the call of the bugle and the rattle of the drum. The massacre at Wyoming stirred the patriots to far greater exertions than the capture of Ticonderoga and Crown Point. The licentious insolence and merciless rapacity of the British grenadiers lost more than their bravery gained and inspired the people with a deadly enmity against the British Government.

All the outrages committed by the invaders during the period of the Revolution pale almost into insignificance in comparison with the excesses and barbarities visited upon the Cubans to-day. The shooting of Mrs. Caldwell, the murder of Jane McCrea, and the hanging of Hayne have a thousand parallels in the actions of the Spaniards. The horrors of British prison ships at New York and Charleston are exceeded by the atrocities in the Cabanas, the Chafarinas, and Fernando Po. The avowed purpose of Weyler was the extermination of the patriots. Two hundred thousand dead already, and a thousand a day treading in their footsteps—a grim reminder of the vision of Mirza.

What must be the essentials of a spirit that can unite a people in a firm resolve for a great effort, and set their lives and fortunes upon the cast. It must have life, growth, cohesion, flexibility. It must have endured trials. It must be fashioned to the purpose; the purpose must be molded to it. It must be prudent, resolute, firm, unyielding; so firm and so undeviating as to fling consequences to the wind, and unflinchingly stand the hazard of the die. Of such material was the spirit of '76 a hundred and twenty years ago; of such material is the spirit of '76 to-day.

What of the lessons of this great movement? What has it taught mankind? It has brought about a revolution in methods in every civilized country under heaven but Spain. The Spaniard alone refuses to learn the lesson. Is it not about time that this willful dullard was hurried into the class of civilization and made to keep pace with its progress? The spirit of '76 is a determined spirit. It has a firm hold on humanity, and is resolved to continue



its guidance until the whole world is united in its scholarship. The period of its minority was too long and its graduation too severe for it to permit anything but progress in every branch of the political philosophy of which it was at once the founder and the guardian.

Mr. Chairman, this Cuban question is not a question of domestic politics, but one of national policy—so high and so broad that it seems to me all should be agreed in regard to it. The great Republic should promptly and imperatively put an end to this monstrosity on our borders, abhorrent to every principle which we profess to uphold. [Loud applause.]

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